

## **Bringing Nutrition Advocacy to Orthodox Church Leaders**

ENGINE, USAID's flagship multi-sector nutrition project, led by Save the Children initiated an innovative approach to engage religious leaders in national efforts to fight childhood stunting. ENGINE baseline survey showed low consumption of animal source by children and women, during the First 1000 days. ENGINE's formative research identified long fasting period as one of the main barriers for this low consumption, especially in Amhara and Tigray.

ENGINE held a 2-day consultative workshop with Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) religious leaders and church scholars, from September 2-3, 2014, in Adama. The workshop, which was the first of its kind for nutrition, created awareness on childhood stunting and consulted with the Orthodox Church's senior leadership to identify religious guidance, biblical references and doctrine on fasting practices, to promote maternal and child nutrition, during the first 1000 days.

Forty-four religious leaders representing ten dioceses from across the country, and five senior church scholars 'Likawunt Guba'e', including the deputy chairman, were delegated by the General Manager's office of the Patriarchate, his Grace Abune Matewos, to attend this important workshop.



ENGINE presented the seriousness of Ethiopia's under-nutrition problem to influence this highly prominent group and used the workshop as a platform for consensus building among church scholars to formulate religious guidelines around fasting practices, related to pregnant/lactating mothers and children under the age of two.

By the end of the workshop, EOTC church scholars developed ten declaration statements, which will be compiled and presented to the overall assembly of church scholars and the Holy Synod council members (over 60 members), chaired by his Holiness Abune Matias I, Patriarch of the EOTC, in mid-October.



Using the information generated in the workshop, ENGINE will develop a sermon guide on maternal and child nutrition, husband and community support in collaboration with EOTC, which will be endorsed and launched by the Holy Synod. As one of ENGINE's local NGO partner, EOTC will implement these guidelines to communities in 12 ENGINE woredas.

In his closing remarks, Aemere Ashebir (one of the five church scholars) delegated to speak on behalf of the group, read the ten declarations, which conveyed their commitment to raise awareness about childhood stunting and maternal under-nutrition to their congregations and ensure that fasting guidelines are standardised in all church teachings and doctrines. He pledged that they would do everything in their power to support ENGINE and the National Nutrition Program's goals to reduce stunting. He reiterated that this was a national problem and everyone should do their part. Finally, he quoted from the Holy Bible, Timothy 5:8, in which Saint Peter states:

***“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”***

***For Further information: Please contact***

***Zelalem Mekuria, ENGINE Senior SBCC Manager  
Save the Children***

***[Zelalem.mekuria@savethechildren.org](mailto:Zelalem.mekuria@savethechildren.org)***

***Or***

***Heran Demissie, ENGINE Communication advisor***

***[Heran.demissie@savethechildren.org](mailto:Heran.demissie@savethechildren.org)***